



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

August 2002

Roanoke River Basin hits high in managing drought lows

By Suzanne Simmons
VDEM Staff Writer

Across the Commonwealth, communities are putting on the heat to manage the state's four-year drought crisis with a potent mixture of conservation, education and ingenuity.

Nowhere is this trend more evident than in the Roanoke River Basin where communities have been hustling to meet local water demands since the river's flow started hitting record lows in late spring.

On July 25, the city of Roanoke's main water supply, Carvins Cove, reached a historic low at 29.3 feet below its spillway. By early August, two alternative sources were ready to go online to offset the low flow.

As July ended, Amherst County implemented mandatory water conservation measures while taking steps to remedy a sudden water supply shortage.

"The fear is that there are only about 60 days of water left in their reserves," says Terry Wagner, director, Office of Water Resources Management, Department of Environmental Quality. "In the next 45 days, Amherst plans to lay about three miles of pipeline to the James River where they will pump water to a tributary of their reservoir."

Amherst County Director of Public Safety Jack Ball says they are also taking a long, hard

look at the county's long-term water supply.

"Our task as managers is to make the fullest use of the resources we have and to start looking at a regional water plan," says Ball.

"We need to do the things Western states have done for years, like developing drought plans, getting more in tune with our water supply and educating our citizens about conservation."

"Roanoke County is working with the city of Roanoke to develop a regional water authority," echoes county Emergency Management Coordinator Donald Gillispie.

"We want an adequate water supply, not just for the county, but for the entire valley."

Both Amherst County and the city of Roanoke have fines in place to enforce water conservation. This is the second time since 1999 the city needed these enforcement measures.

"I don't think we'll have to have too many fines this time because people are responding really well," says Larry Creasy, water service assistant, Roanoke City Water Department.

"We've been trying to emphasize education instead of enforcement. I don't want to fine someone just because their child turned on the hose."

In adjacent Roanoke County, county planner foresight has helped augment and strengthen the local water supply.



Bone dry? Not quite, but Carvins Cove did reach a historic low in July 2002. (Photo courtesy The Roanoke Times, Eric Brady.)

"Our only water resource is the Roanoke River, so we built the Spring Hollow Reservoir in the 1990s," says Gillispie.

The reservoir, designed to meet the county's growing needs at least through 2040, can produce 20 to 30 million gallons

of water a day. The county only uses between six and seven million gallons and treats an additional four million gallons daily for the city of Roanoke.

In Bedford County, Director of Fire-Rescue and Emergency
(continued on page 3)

Virginia requests KI stockpile from the NRC

Virginia has now joined 16 other states in requesting a stockpile of potassium iodide (KI) from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to help safeguard the public in the event of a nuclear power plant radiation release.

The Virginia Department of Health has requested 660,000 doses of potassium iodide for an estimated 330,000 citizens who live, work or visit within 10 miles of the Surry and North Anna nuclear power stations.

"Virginia's decision to accept the potassium iodide stockpile does not mean that we believe there is an increased risk of an incident," says VDEM State Coordinator Michael Cline.

"It is simply an additional protective measure we can use in the unlikely event of such an emergency."

The pills represent a two-day supply for adults and a four-day supply for children. Cline emphasizes that evacuation and in-place sheltering are still the state's primary means of safeguarding the public.

According to the NRC, this dose would protect people while they evacuate.



Stocking up. VDEM Radiological Program Manager Art Warren displays sample KI tablets. (VDEM Photo by Bob Lambert.)

"The potassium iodide medication is not a substitute for emergency procedures, such as evacuation and in-place sheltering during a nuclear emergency," echoes Virginia Health Commissioner Dr. Robert B. Stroube, M.P.H.

Interim plans call for the Department of Health to maintain supplies of the tablets near the two power stations.

"Potassium iodide is most effective if taken within a few hours before, during, or immediately after exposure," says Dr. Stroube. "The medication can help prevent

thyroid cancer, especially in children. Children are more likely to develop thyroid cancer following exposure to radioactive iodine."

However, the Department of Health warns that anyone allergic to iodine should avoid taking KI. Additionally, individuals with certain thyroid diseases, such as Grave's disease, thyroiditis and goiter, and people with known skin diseases, should consult their physicians before taking potassium iodide.

"We are working with the Virginia Department of Health and local governments within a 10-mile radius of both nuclear power stations to develop detailed plans for distributing and administering KI to the public," says Cline.

"Once these plans are finalized, we will be able to effectively integrate this measure into our emergency response procedures."

For further information on potassium iodide, check the Department of Health Web site at www.vdh.state.va.us and click on "Hot Issues."

Unified command puts highway safety in the fast lane

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

On a typical day on a major Northern Virginia commuter highway, hoards of travelers navigate the busy thoroughfare into Washington, D.C. Suddenly, a tractor-trailer overturns in an inbound lane and traffic begins to back up.

The situation goes from bad to worse when a tow-truck operator is prohibited from inspecting the vehicle to determine the proper equipment needed to remove it from the scene.

As the truck continues to block the road, drivers aren't the only ones left fuming in the resulting gridlock.

This scenario from a few years ago is far less likely to occur now thanks to the Seaboard/State Incident Management (SIM) Committee and its endorsement of the unified command system for the management of major highway accidents (including hazmat incidents).

"With a unified command, this kind of incident won't occur," SIM Chairman Jon

DuFresne says. "Everyone works together instead of separately. All are involved in the incident simultaneously, and we don't re-open the highway until everyone has done their job."

Wherever it occurs, a major traffic incident ties up police, fire and medical resources, creates the potential for dangerous secondary accidents, and can delay other emergency responses.

Though it is regularly used by fire departments, DuFresne says implementation of the system in this setting has required a gradual change in attitude to reduce turf battles in emergency response.

"If unified command is in place, you put aside the typical turf battles," DuFresne says. "As Fairfax Fire Chief Jerry Wine likes to say, 'It's not a question of who's in charge, but who's in charge of what.'"

Gregg Britt, VDEM's acting Technological Hazards Division director, applauds the change. "Everybody in emergency response benefits from this program," Britt says.



Removing road blocks. Everyone wins when the unified command system is used to manage major highway accidents like this one involving a cargo of black powder (VDEM Photo).

"Now, the tow-truck driver is talking to the fire department; the fire department is talking to State Police; State Police are talking to VDOT and VDOT's talking to the local agencies.

"We want to expedite the cleanup of an incident. We want the highway reopened quickly but need to make sure the job is done safely. (continued on page 4)

Pittsylvania partnership helps alert hearing-impaired citizens

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

If your weather radio sounds an alert and you don't hear it, is it really an effective emergency notification tool?

In many communities, this potentially life-threatening scenario is a frightening fact of life for hearing-impaired citizens.

Pittsylvania County was no different until Emergency Management Coordinator Jim Davis "saw the light." He came up with an innovative and relatively inexpensive solution in a term paper he wrote for an emergency management course at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala.

By converting existing NOAA-type weather alerts into a colored light and vibrating signal, hearing-impaired citizens could be alerted to impending hazards (including non-weather emergencies) any time of day or night.

He found a radio manufacturer already producing a color-coded LCD screen that indicates the type and level of emergency. For example, a red signal with the word "tornado" indicates a tornado warning. "Yellow" means watch and "Green" means an advisory.

Adding an output jack connects the radio to a light and pillow vibrator that can alert a hearing-impaired individual to an impending emergency. The citizen can then turn on his or her television set to pick up emergency information being scrolled across the screen.

"If necessary, they can then evacuate under their individual emergency plan to a safe location," Davis says.

Each unit is programmed to a specific locality. If the individual moves, it's an easy matter to re-program the unit so that it will respond to emergencies in the new location.

Davis also enlisted the aid of Danville Emergency Management Coordinator Douglas Young and Carl Amos, coordinator for the deaf and hearing impaired at Danville Community College, so the entire Danville metropolitan area would benefit from his idea.

Amos successfully raised \$5,000 to buy the specially modified radios for more than three dozen hearing-impaired residents, and Young organized the effort for his city. The units have been readied for distribution at the end of this month following a training session on how to use them.

"I wanted to provide public education and increase awareness so the hearing impaired could take an active role in enhancing their own level of safety," Davis says. "The radios are a tool to better sustain that degree of protection."

For further information on the specially equipped emergency alert radio, contact James Davis at (434) 432-7920, or by e-mail at jdavis@pittgov.org.



(Courtesy Photo.)

Drought (continued from page 1)

Management Jack Jones, Jr., says the county is facing both private well failures and the threat of wildfires this summer.

"Very little of our county has fire hydrant protection. We have a dry hydrant system drawing from streams and ponds. Now they're so low we don't even have that system," he said. "We've frontloaded our safety response efforts. We send out three tankers to every fire call and immediately send out two tones for structure fires."

A countywide burning ban is also in effect, and private wells drying up across the county only add to the wildfire problem, says Willie Jones, county public service authority administrator.

"In the New London area of the county, literally dozens of wells are failing. I know of four or five new wells drilled 500 feet deep that hit only dust," said Jones.

In June, the county applied for a Virginia Resources loan to expedite water line extension projects already in the works. Jones hopes to have water piped to areas in greatest need by December.

Private wells are also failing in Campbell County, where 150 well replacement permits were issued already this calendar year. County supervisors, initiating actions under VDEM potable water supply shortage procedures, declared a drought emergency in July.

The county has also planned a water line extension in one area where a great number of homes are affected. In the meantime, they have provided residents access to the utility's water system and placed portable water storage tanks in affected residential areas.

Emergency managers say water conservation education campaigns are their frontline of defense and feel this summer's drought impacts would have been much worse if they hadn't focused on education. In Roanoke County, conservation education has been an ongoing, successful campaign since the late 1990s.

"This whole area is very conscientious now about the drought. The local water authority is conducting education, and the coverage by the local media is very good," says Ball, whose county activated open burning and fireworks bans at the end of June.

In his mid-July drought summit in Richmond, Gov. Mark R. Warner said that it is still too early to consider mandatory statewide water conservation. He added that local water suppliers are the best judges of their water reserves and has asked decision makers in the hardest-hit regions to meet at month's end to discuss their options. In the Roanoke River Basin, they will be ready.



Drought strategy. Gov. Mark Warner addresses meteorologists at his July drought summit. (Photo courtesy Office of the Governor.)

Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Train-the-Trainer
Aug. 7/Culpeper; Aug. 28/Richmond

ISC/EOC Interface
Oct. 2-3/Northern Virginia

Leadership and Influence
Oct. 9-11/Chesterfield

Decision Making in a Crisis
Oct. 22/Chesterfield

Effective Communication
Oct. 23-25/Chesterfield

Radiological

RERT: Field Team Monitoring
Sep. 17/Henrico

Reservist Training

Reservist Program Orientation
(New Reservists Only)
Sep. 10/VDEM HQ (Trade Court)

Search and Rescue

Instructor Workshop
Aug. 24-25/Richmond

Managing Land for Search Operations
Sep. 27-29 & Nov. 8-10/
Charlottesville

Field Team Leader
Sep. 20-22 & Oct. 4-6/Nelson County

Incident Commander for Ground
Oct. 18-20/Richmond

SAR Council
Oct. 26/Richmond

Technological Hazards

Public Safety Response to Terrorism (PSRT) - Tactical
Aug. 10-11/Henrico County
Sep. 7-8/Rockbridge County

PSRT - Management
Sep. 10-11/Petersburg
Sep. 14-15/Henrico

PSRT - Awareness
Sep. 14/Sussex
Sep. 22/Sussex

Hazmat Planning & Mgmt.
Sep. 13-15/Bristol

Hazardous Materials Conference
Sep. 26-28/Virginia Beach

Hazmat Technician
Oct. 14-25/Ashland

Incident Command System (cont'd from page 2)

"The more organized the response, the more quickly traffic gets back to normal and less likely a secondary accident is to occur."

To drive the message home, DuFresne conducted his "Valley Tour" earlier this year consisting of eight emergency response training sessions between Abingdon and Winchester along the heavily traveled but largely rural Interstate 81 corridor.

A total of 776 local and volunteer emergency responders, including tow-truck operators, took part. DuFresne says he picked the rural area because many of the communities along the busy highway have limited resources to respond to a highway incident.

DuFresne says implementing the unified command structure for highway responses is the SIM committee's biggest contribution to public safety in its eight-year existence.

He says he would like to do a similar training tour next year in another part of the state and to strengthen a regional program in Hampton Roads.

"We want to put a local and regional emphasis on the program, rather than a state emphasis," DuFresne says.

For further information on the SIM group and its membership, contact Jon DuFresne, ITS operations engineer, Virginia Department of Transportation, at (804) 786-2885, or by e-mail at jon.dufresne@virginiadot.org.

Get expo-sed for hurricane and all-hazards preparedness



Event:
PreparEXPO
Sponsor:

Greater Richmond Chapter,
American Red Cross
Location: Regency Square
Mall, Richmond
Date: Sep. 14, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Contact: David Bolter at
(804) 780-2262 or
BolterD@usa.redcross.org



Event: Hurricane Expo
Sponsors: City of
Portsmouth, American

Red Cross, Lowe's Home
Improvement Warehouse
Location: Lowe's Home
Improvement Warehouse
Victory Boulevard, Portsmouth
Date: Aug. 17, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Contact: Chief Bruce Sterling,
(757) 393-8338



Event: Hurricane Expo
Sponsors: Cities of
Norfolk, Suffolk,

Portsmouth & Chesapeake, Isle
of Wight County, American
Red Cross, NWS, Chesapeake
Amateur Radio Club
Location: Chesapeake Square
Date: Aug. 23-24/Mall Hours
Contact: Hui Shan Walker,
(757) 382-6504



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